



# GOD'S GOODNESS

WEEK 7  
04.16.17

## FOCUS VERSE

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### Psalm 107:1

O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

## LESSON TEXT

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### Psalm 107:1–15

1 O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;

3 And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.

4 They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.

5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.

6 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.

7 And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

8 Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

9 For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

10 Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron;

11 Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High:

12 Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.

13 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.

14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.

15 Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!



## FOCUS THOUGHT

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God is by nature good, and that attribute shapes His relationship with humanity.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## God Is Good All the Time

It is always disappointing to hear that a cultural icon has failed morally. The news media are quick to report the details of every politician who has an extramarital affair, every athlete who uses performance enhancing drugs, and every businessperson who commits fraud or embezzlement. Every time one of these stories appears in the news, good people are saddened. When high profile figures are immoral, the whole culture is affected by their negative influence.

It is even more disappointing, however, when someone generally regarded as a person of high ethical standards is found to be morally bankrupt. In such cases, we are disillusioned and find it difficult not to question

our faith in others of good reputation. We can be tempted to think everyone is hypocritical and disingenuous. Of course, the reality is that one failure, or even many failures, does not take away from the many people who are indeed upright and trustworthy. Nevertheless, we cannot help but lose a little of our faith in humanity each time a scandal is made public.

In the midst of such uncertainty, what a wonderful consolation it is to know we serve a God who is above reproach. We will be disappointed by others on occasion. Indeed, we are often less than satisfied with our own conduct. But God will always be worthy of our trust and confidence. He is always and uncompromisingly good. He will never let us down.

### OUTLINE

#### I. GOD IS GOOD

- A. Goodness Defined
- B. God's Goodness Is Great

#### II. GOD'S GOODNESS IS AVAILABLE

- A. The Lord's Mercy Endures Forever
- B. The Lord Is Not Willing That Any Should Perish
- C. Now Is the Day of Salvation
- D. One Aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit

#### III. GOD'S GOODNESS HAS LIMITS

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Psalm 107 begins the fifth and final book within the Psalter. Some printings of the Bible do not indicate this evidence of intentional arrangement within the Book of Psalms, but those that do set forth the divisions in a straightforward way. For example, over Psalm 1 the reader may see something like this: BOOK ONE, *Psalms 1–41*. Then, over Psalm 42: BOOK TWO, *Psalms 42–72*; over Psalm 73: BOOK THREE, *Psalms 73–89*; over Psalm 90: BOOK FOUR, *Psalms 90–106*. Over the text for this lesson, printings that follow this

convention will present this reading: BOOK FIVE, *Psalms 107–150*.

This is not a mere curiosity. A close reading of the text shows that the first four books have nearly identical endings. Psalm 41:13, the final verse in Book One, ends: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen." Psalm 72:19–20, the last two verses in Book Two, read: "And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." Psalm 89:52, the final verse of Book Three, reads: "Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen." Psalm 106:48, the verse that ends Book Four, reads: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD."

There is no need for Book Five to have the concluding "Amen," for the psalm, as well as the entire Psalter, obviously ends at this point. There is still, however, a similarity between this final verse and the previous conclusions: "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD" (Psalm 150:6).

The shaping of the Book of Psalms into five smaller books and the apparent intentionality

indicated by the similar endings invites us to examine closely the connections between these books. When we do this, we note thematic relationships between the ending of one book and the beginning of the next. These relationships serve to knit together the entire Psalter as one flowing literary unit. For example, the next to last verse in Book Four is a cry for deliverance: “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise” (Psalm 106:47). Psalm 107:1, the beginning of Book Five, is a prayer of thanksgiving for the answer to this prayer: “O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.” As this prayer of thanksgiving progresses, it becomes more specifically related to the deliverance requested in Psalm 106:47.

The Lord’s answer to prayer demonstrates His goodness that is referred to in the first verse of Psalm 107. Four times in Psalm 107 identical words are used to call for praise to the Lord for His goodness.

*“Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31).*

The parallelism of this Hebrew poetry, wherein the second line further develops the idea of the first line, indicates that the specific “goodness” in view is the demonstration of the Lord’s “wonderful works.”

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. GOD IS GOOD

People of faith in all generations have discovered that God is good. One way God demonstrates His goodness is that He responds to prayer, demonstrating His mercy by meeting specific needs of those who pray.

#### A. Goodness Defined

The Hebrew word *tōv* is translated *good* in Psalm 107:1. The word has a range of meaning determined by the context in which it is used. It is used to refer to the best of what a person or place has (Genesis 24:10), well-being (Proverbs 11:10), happiness (Deuteronomy

28:47), success, happiness sent by the Lord, possessions, blessing, salvation, produce of the land (Isaiah 63:7), and forgiveness of sins (Psalm 25:7). (See Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.)

#### B. God’s Goodness Is Great

The goodness of God is described as “great” in various places in Scripture. (See Nehemiah 9:25, 35; Psalm 31:19; 145:7; Isaiah 63:7; Zechariah 9:17.) The word *great*, translated from the Hebrew *rav*, suggests an abundance of goodness. In other words, God is never miserly or stingy with the good things He is willing to do for those who call on Him.

*God’s goodness leads to repentance.* “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

The Greek word translated *goodness* (*chrēstos*) here describes “an event or activity which is useful or benevolent.” It is “an expression meaning ‘to help’ . . . ‘that which helps people’” or “that which is good for people” (*Louw-Nida Lexicon*).

The context of Romans 2:4 (Romans 1:18 to 3:23) involves the universal sinfulness of human beings. Some may misunderstand God’s longsuffering to mean He will never hold them accountable for their sins. (See Ecclesiastes 8:11–13.) The reason God does not immediately judge sin, however, is to give sinners time to repent. Though sinners deserve judgment, God, in His rich goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, attempts to lead them to repentance. Those who take advantage of the delay of judgment to sin further despise the goodness of God. He is attempting to help them avoid judgment, but they are refusing His help.

*Delight yourself in His goodness.* “And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee

forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 6:10–12).

This promise God made to ancient Israel describes the houses they would occupy as being filled with “good things.” The word *tōv* is used here, indicating that material goods are not inherently evil. They are compared with water and food, as mentioned later in this verse, so these “good things” may be thought of as necessities. Materialism, the view that elevates possessions above one’s relationship with God, is certainly wrong. (See I Timothy 6:6–10.) But those material things necessary to life are good blessings from God.

## II. GOD’S GOODNESS IS AVAILABLE

Psalm 107 demonstrates God’s willingness to respond to those who cry out to Him in their trouble.

*“Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. . . . Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses” (Psalm 107:6, 13).*

It is important to remember that the Israelites were in these troubles and distresses because of their rebellion against the Lord. It was never God’s intention for them to wander in the wilderness. Their wandering was due to their rebellion against Him. (See Psalm 107:11–12.)

God is inherently good. He is not good in response to our goodness. Rather, we access His goodness by crying out for His help. Our cry is a sign of repentance and of our recognition of our need of the Lord.

### A. The Lord’s Mercy Endures Forever

One of the most remarkable biblical examples of the Lord’s enduring mercy is found in the Book of Lamentations. The book expresses Jeremiah’s horror over the destruction of Jerusalem when the city was invaded by Babylon in 586 BC. One thing that makes this such a significant account of mercy is the acknowledgement that the destruction was the judgment of God for Judah’s rebellion.

*“The LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children*

*are gone into captivity before the enemy (Lamentations 1:5).*

*“The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof” (Lamentations 2:2).*

*“The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation” (Lamentations 2:5).*

*“And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly. . . . The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces” (Lamentations 2:6–7).*

Would we expect to find expressions of mercy in the midst of these declarations of divine judgment?

Lamentations 1, 2, 4, and 5 each consists of twenty-two verses. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 are acrostics. The first word of the first verse of each chapter begins with *aleph*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; the first word of the second verse in each chapter begins with *beth*, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This pattern continues to the first word of the last verse of each chapter, which begins with *tau*, the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, but it consists of twenty-two verses, just as if it were.

In the midst of this fascinating arrangement is chapter 3, which has sixty-six verses, or three times twenty-two. Like chapters 1, 2, and 4, chapter 3 is also an acrostic, but in a different form. In each of the first three verses, the first word begins with *aleph*. In each of the next three verses, the first word begins with *beth*. Again, this continues to the last three verses, each of which begins with *tau*.

This obviously intentional arrangement invites further examination of chapter 3, the

heart of the book. The central six verses in the book provide startling insight into the context of the destruction that was a result of the judgment of God.

*“For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not” (Lamentations 3:31–36).*

A literal translation of the Hebrew phrase rendered “he doth not afflict willingly” is *he does not afflict from his heart*. Although it may be necessary for God to discipline those who rebel against Him, affliction does not show us the heart of God. In His heart, God is love (I John 4:8). In the language of Lamentations, “though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.”

Jeremiah’s lament is first interrupted in Lamentations 3:21: “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” What could possibly introduce hope in the midst of this seemingly hopeless situation? The circumstances were so dire that Jeremiah’s eyes overflowed with tears (Lamentations 1:16). The corpses of young men and women lay about on the streets of Jerusalem (Lamentations 2:21). Where can hope be found in these scenes of destruction and death?

Hope rises from these ashes when Jeremiah recalls to mind the enduring nature of God’s mercy.

*“It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD” (Lamentations 3:22–26).*

## **B. The Lord Is Not Willing That Any Should Perish**

The Lord’s reluctance to see anyone perish is seen not only in the Old Testament in relation to temporal suffering but also in the New Testament in relation to eternal salvation.

*“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).*

In its context, this verse indicates that the reason the Lord has not yet returned is His long-suffering. He continues to delay the judgment for which human rebellion calls in order to give people an opportunity to repent. In His words to the church in Thyatira, Jesus said in reference to Jezebel, “And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; but she repented not” (Revelation 2:21). The word translated *space* (*chronos*) means “time.” Similar statements are found in the Old Testament.

*“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23).*

*“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11).*

Peter’s statement that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” indicates that any person can be saved. No one is outside the provisions God has made for salvation.

## **C. Now Is the Day of Salvation**

*“(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)” (II Corinthians 6:2).*

In his use of Isaiah 49:8, Paul pointed out that this present time is the time to be saved.

In the immediate context, the time to which Paul referred is the time since Christ's reconciling work on the cross.

*"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:18–21).*

The reconciling work performed by Christ means there is no reason for anyone to be lost. God has been reconciled to humanity; all that remains is for humanity to be reconciled to Him.

## **D. One Aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit**

In his list of the fruit of the Spirit, Paul includes the quality of goodness. The word is translated from the Greek *agathōsunē*. This is a different word than mentioned previously in this lesson, and it refers to a relationship with others that is characterized by generosity or the willingness to give or share. (See Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*.) In its context here, the word refers to the believer's goodness rather than to God's goodness, but we must keep in mind it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Thus it still reflects a gift from God that works in the life of one who is filled with His Spirit.

## **III. GOD'S GOODNESS HAS LIMITS**

*"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of*

*Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly . . . the Lord knoweth how to . . . reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (II Peter 2:4–6, 9).*

The fact that God is good and merciful does not mean people will never face judgment. Even if the judgment of God is never brought to bear on a person in this lifetime, "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). A reference to the certainty of this judgment appears toward the end of the last book in the Bible.

*"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:11–12).*

But as it relates to those still living, it seems clear that God is not looking for reasons to judge and destroy; He is looking for reasons to forgive and heal. The account of Sodom and Gomorrah provides an example of this.

When the Lord told Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham negotiated with Him in an effort to avoid the destruction of Lot's family. Abraham's key assumption as he began this effort was that "the Judge of all the earth" would do right (Genesis 18:25). He could not imagine that it was right to "destroy the righteous with the wicked" (Genesis 18:23).

At first, Abraham asked the Lord if He would destroy the city if fifty righteous people could be found there. The Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes" (Genesis 18:26). Abraham countered, asking if the Lord would go ahead with His plans if only forty-five righteous people could be found. The Lord answered, "If I find there forty and five, I will not

destroy it” (Genesis 18:28). This continued until Abraham asked if the city would be spared if ten righteous people were found there. The Lord agreed not to destroy the city in this case (Genesis 18:32). One can only wonder what God’s response would have been if Abraham had continued his negotiation.

One thing we can learn from this story is that God does not wish to destroy; He looks for reasons to forgive, to spare, and to save. As Jeremiah said after viewing the wrenching scenes of death and destruction in Jerusalem, “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not” (Lamentations 3:22). In other words, justice called for the complete obliteration of Jerusalem and its population. Those who were spared were evidence of God’s merciful compassion. So was the situation in Sodom. The survival of Lot and his two daughters demonstrated God’s willingness to extend mercy.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

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The Scriptures we have studied in this lesson suggest three specific courses of action as they relate to experiencing God’s goodness.

First, we should pray specific prayers. Israel’s experience with the goodness of God as described in Psalm 107 was a consequence of the specific prayer recorded in Psalm 106:47. This was a prayer for deliverance, and this was not just generic deliverance. It was a prayer to be gathered “from among the Gentiles” (NKJV). This means it was a prayer for restoration to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In response to this prayer, they were “gathered . . . out of the lands, from

the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south” (Psalm 107:3).

An examination of the prayers recorded in Scripture reveals they were specific prayers. To pray is to talk with God. This privilege is so significant that it is worthwhile to spend time in thoughtful preparation so as to pray intelligently. Although Paul did say he would pray with the spirit, a reference to praying in tongues, he also said he would “pray with the understanding” (I Corinthians 14:15).

Second, we must be willing to embrace the goodness of God and to accept His mercy and forgiveness. Some wrestle with an ongoing sense of guilt and condemnation, perhaps from a notion that to confess to being forgiven is a dangerous assumption. But such thinking discounts the work of Christ on His cross and questions its efficacy. From the perspective of the Old Testament, a failure to acknowledge that one’s prayer is answered and the work is done runs counter to these words found four times in Psalm 107: “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31).

Third, we must forgive others. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included these words: “And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). This prayer is meant to be prayed daily, for it includes the phrase “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). When we forgive others, it demonstrates the genuineness of our confession and opens the door for us to receive forgiveness. When there is no heart to forgive, there is no heart to receive forgiveness. (See Matthew 6:14–15.) ■

## REFLECTIONS

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- In what specific ways do the “wonderful works” of the Lord indicate His “goodness”?
- Discuss the various meanings of the Hebrew word translated “good.”
- How does the meaning of the Greek word translated “goodness” differ from that of the Hebrew word translated “good”?
- Discuss the literal meaning of the phrase translated “he doth not afflict willingly” in Lamentations 3:33.
- In Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit, what does the word “goodness” mean?
- How do we know there is a limit to God’s goodness?